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c.2 "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother." Matt. 12:50

**A Letter to
Christian Laymen
Assigned to Duty
Overseas**

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A LETTER TO CHRISTIAN LAYMEN ASSIGNED TO DUTY OVERSEAS

YOU are one of the many Americans assigned to an overseas post of duty by our government, or by some other national or international agency. It is probably a new venture for you. The good wishes of your friends and countrymen go with you. You will be their representative, as well as that of your employer.

Many commercial agencies today are carefully briefing their representatives for this new experience. The International Division of the Radio Corporation of America tells its representatives that "RCA is dedicated to the principle: Service with integrity. . . . We are concerned here with your attitude; what you take in your mind and heart. If you could pack only two things, take with you tolerance and friendship." (See *So You're Going To Work Abroad for RCA*.) This suggests counsel that would be of great value also for tourists and for the men and women in the armed forces of our country.

The Christian Layman Abroad

There are thousands of Christian laymen in various types of overseas service today. Often, they may not know of the Christian groups that already exist in the areas where they are assigned. They may not know of the new opportunities for Christian fellowship that are available, nor of the importance of their own initiative in Christian service. For example, the Swiss Missionary Council points out that while there are only 300 regular missionaries abroad from Switzerland, there are 65,000 Swiss citizens abroad under government or commercial assignments. A Christian training center has, therefore, been established to help Swiss laymen to become non-official missionaries of the Gospel.

There are about 18,000 missionaries from the United States and Canada abroad at the present time. We do not know how many hundreds of thousands of Americans are abroad under assignments not specifically associated with the Church. The number must be large. The influence and example of this vast group should be more apparent in

the Church's ministry of reconciliation. True membership in any Christian fellowship here at home automatically makes a person a witness of the Spirit when he goes abroad. It must be a worthy witness.

You Face An Important Task

A PERSONAL letter on my desk from Africa reports that "the conduct of many white people out here is disgraceful." The issue here is obviously not one of political ideology but of personal character. Then, too, bad example often exists in ways that are less clearly defined. It is not always shown only by those who are grossly immoral. The overseas host of a visiting representative of the Church from here in the United States reports that, because of a lack of simple understanding, the guest's brief presence in their midst "did not do the relationship between the national Church and the Church at home any good." So, while the problem may lie in a lack of personal character, it may also reside in a lack of simple understanding concerning alien cultures and the growing nationalistic and racial feelings that are increasingly prevalent today in many lands.

A Fellowship of Non-Official Missionaries

YOUR Church asks you to become a member of "The Fellowship of Non-Official Missionaries." I think we should use capitalized letters and begin to think of this Fellowship in terms of a reality that already exists in spirit. Thousands of devoted men and women, both in the military service and in civilian occupations, have already done pioneer work.

The unofficial Fellowship is a part of the established work of the Christian world mission. It should be more explicitly so. The ways for participation in the ministry and witness of the world Church, by Christian laymen overseas, are many. Regular missionaries of the Church are already in most lands to direct or to assist you. If not, a layman with zeal for good works, will soon find a point for some form of witness in Christ's name that will be worthy of his faith, and that will make his reputation an asset in promoting world peace.

Preparation for New Partnerships

YOUR local Church and Church school are interested in your preparation for overseas duty. Technical knowledge for your specific task is important, but there is additional preparation needed for life in the midst of national cultures alien to your own, if hostile misunderstanding is to be avoided. Scripture has stated the matter briefly for us, "Wisdom is the principal thing . . . and with all thy getting get understanding."

The Board of International Missions has literature available for you on its overseas programs in Japan, Hong Kong, India, Iraq, Africa, Honduras and Ecuador. The Commission on World Service has work in Europe as well as in other areas and can provide additional material on its program. The lesson material for your Church school, prepared by the Board of Christian Education and Publication, will provide much good orientation. The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole world requires preparation.

Space to pack books will be limited, but you should have with you for study *That The World May Know* by Charles W. Ranson. It will show you the meaning of the Christian mission in the world and inspire you to have a part in it. Sensational narratives on travel are not adequate without the interpretations of Christian faith and vision.

The Problem Anticipated

WHEN Mark Twain wrote "Innocents Abroad" in 1875, he predicted international problems of greater import than he perhaps realized in telling that "We were troubled a little at dinner today by the conduct of an American, who talked very loudly and coarsely, and laughed boisterously where all others were quiet and well-behaved. . . . This fellow said: 'I am a free-born American, sir, and I want everybody to know it.' . . ."

An understanding of continent for continent, tolerance of nation for nation, respect of man for man—these attitudes are part of the message of Christ. Arrogance and rowdyism will not be your personal temptation; however, the value of good example continues.

They May Want You To Return

YOU may be going to many different nations. You will enjoy the hospitality of their citizens. Their talents will encourage you, and their hopes will inspire you. But those with experience give us a warning. It is the need to avoid clannishness when so many opportunities exist to associate with persons of vocational and cultural interests other than your own.

Christian wisdom will be more important for you than sociological knowledge. The latter will be learned rapidly, if you have learned from the New Testament, that "we are ambassadors of Christ, God making His appeal through us." A reputation for integrity and service is usually rewarded with an invitation for an early return.

May God's help be with you as you go forth, and with us who remain at home, so that together we might be a part of Christ's answer for the world's needs today.

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“We believe that God is calling the Church to express its mission not only through foreign missionaries sent by the boards, but also through an increasing flow of Christian laymen and women who go out across the world in business, industry and government and who do so with a deep conviction that God calls to them to witness for Him in all of life. The churches should be alive to the strategic importance of the spread of the Gospel by such lay people. The International Missionary Council is requested to explore ways whereby the churches can prepare and advise such lay people, linking them to the churches and ‘foreign missionary’ agencies in the areas to which they go.”

—*The Missionary Obligation of the Church*, International Missionary Council, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y., U.S.A.; 2 Eaton Gate, London S.W.1, England.
